Nejimaki no Niwa

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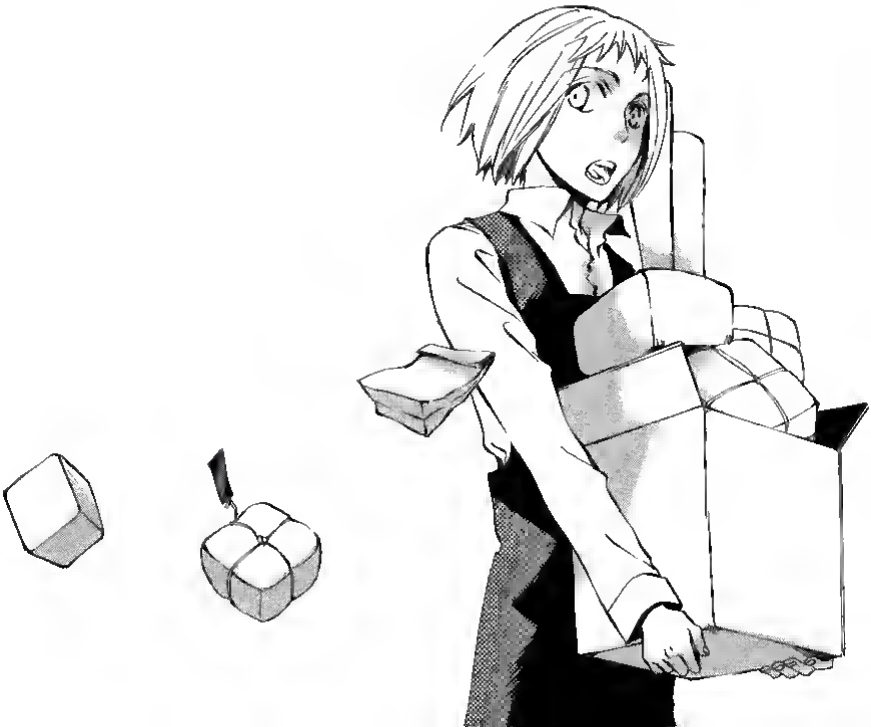
Chapter 4



NOW WHERE IS THIS BOOK?

I SHOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE ALONE.
THIS DUNGEON OF A LIBRARY GIVES ME THE CREEPS

Eeeeeeek!
DID SOMEBODY ENTER THE LIBRARY?
MAYBE THEY SAW—
NEVER MIND WE SHOULD BE HEADING BACK
PULL
JUST LEAVE THE BOOKS HERE! WE CAN COME SORT THEM OUT LATER!
Clatter
Clatter

Ek!

BUMP
WHAT'S WRONG? DID SOMETHING HAPPEN TO YOU?
TH-THERE WAS THIS BLOB—
BLOB?
THANK GOD THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE HERE!
HELP!
THANK...
dash dash dash
SOME WHITE FLOATING BLOB!
IT WAS A GHOST, I'M SURE OF IT!
A GHOST?

I ASKED AROUND...
AND MET A BUNCH OF PEOPLE WHO SWORE THEY SAW A GHOST IN THE LIBRARY RECENTLY.
I SAW A REALLY PALE WOMAN WITH SNOW-FLAKES FALING AROUND HER.
SHE MUST HAVE BEEN THE SNOW QUEEN
AND THE SPINNING WHEEL KEPT SPINNING...
ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND.
I WAS SCARED OUT OF MY WITS.
I SAW A SHIPWRECK.
I'M GUESSING IT WAS PART OF A SPANISH FLEET THAT SANK IN SOME SEA.

SPINNING WHEEL?
ARE THERE SUCH GHOSTS?
SNOW QUEEN?

SEEING THE NEED TO CHECK UP ON THE STORIES, I VOLUNTEERED FOR THE LIBRARY DUTY! WHICH IS JUST PERFECT FOR MY INVESTIGATION.
ANYWAY,
THESE STORIES SOUND LIKE THEY COME STRAIGHT OUT OF BOOKS, KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
THERE'S ALSO THE GHOST OF A PRINCE WITH A BIRTHMARK ON HIS FACE

I'M BLOWN AWAY BY YOUR PASSION FOR ALL THINGS SUPERNATURAL, YAN
WELL, RAUM, I SIGNED YOU UP, TOO.
...
Aren't you excited?

YOU COUGH A LOT THESE DAYS.
IS IT BECAUSE OF THE SEASON CHANGE?
TAKE BETTER CARE OF YOURSELF. I'D BE BORED TO DEATH IF YOU WERE TOO SICK TO GET OUT OF BED
HA HA.
YOU REALLY LOOK OUT FOR ME, SYLV
WE'RE ALMOST FAMILY
YEAH.
IF YOU LEAVE ME, I...
I--I WOULDN'T HAVE KNOWN WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE HAD SEEN THAT JUST NOW
CECIL.

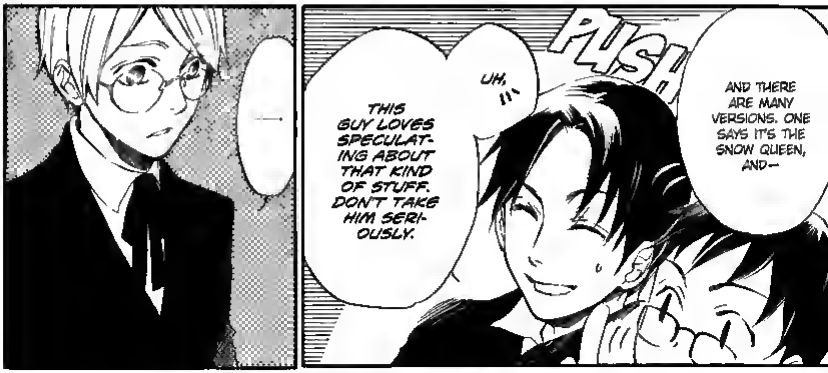
The prince, who had a birthmark on his face, was feared by his people. He was thus brought up in confinement.

"If I could have a friend who wasn't afraid of this mark.
One day, he said,
"I would give my life...
"to protect him."

ISN'T THERE A DATABASE FOR ALL THE BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY?
ORGANIZING THE CARD CATALOG IS A LOT OF WORK.
WE'RE CHECKING IF WE MISSED ANY OF THE BOOKS ON THIS SUBJECT.
AH
AND THAT'S A WRAP!

DO YOU ALWAYS HELP OUT IN THE LIBRARY, CECIL?
I SUPPOSE I DO. AFTER ALL, I LIKE BOOKS.
HAVE YOU SEEN A GHOST HERE?

A GHOST?
YEAH PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SAYING THEY SAW A GHOST IN THE LIBRARY

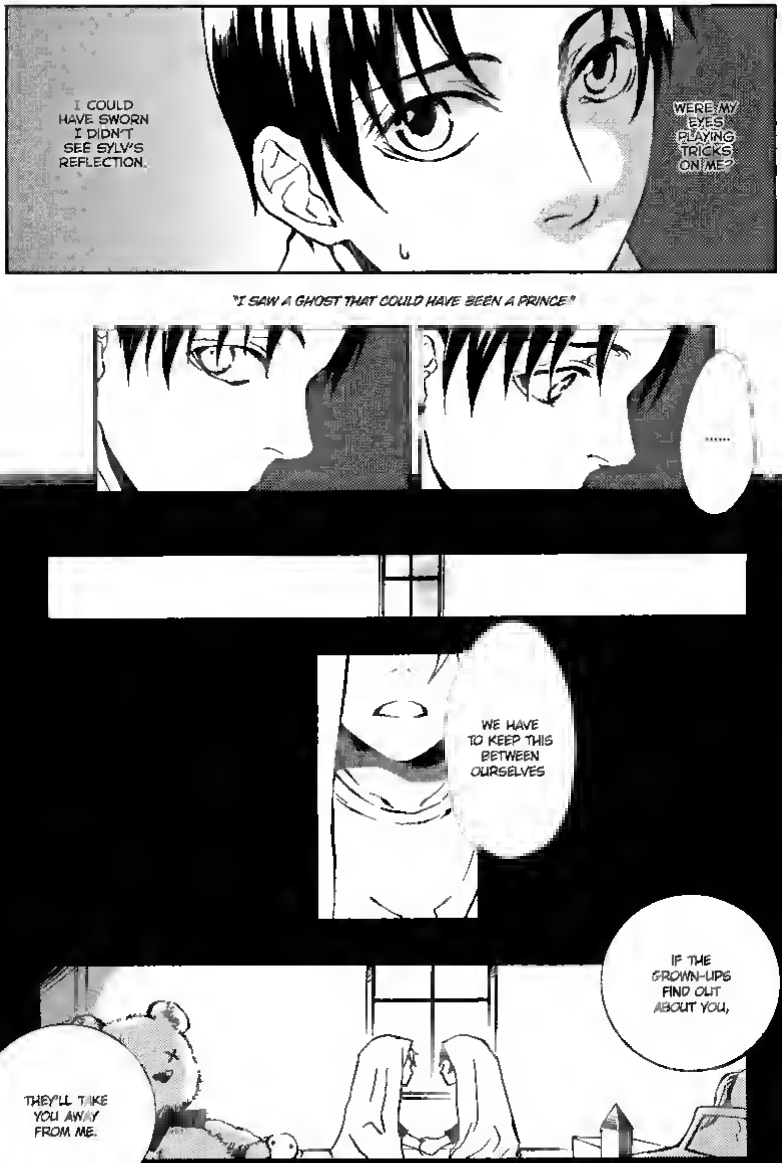

PUSH
AND THERE ARE MANY VERSIONS. ONE SAYS IT'S THE SNOW QUEEN, AND—
UH, I'M
THIS GUY LOVES SPECULATING ABOUT THAT KIND OF STUFF. DON'T TAKE HIM SERIOUSLY.
—

CECIL?
AH!
UM,
THAT'S THE FIRST TIME I'VE HEARD ABOUT A GHOST HERE.
SO YOU'VE NEVER HEARD ANY STORIES?
RATTLE
CECIL, ARE YOU DONE?
SYLV!
I SEE YOU'VE GOT COMPANY TODAY
HI
I'M YAN,
AND THIS IS RALIM.
NICE MEETING YOU
NICE TO MEET YOU, TOO ARE YOU UPPER-CLASSMEN?
I'M SYLV,
PRINCE OF OERT—
SYLV!

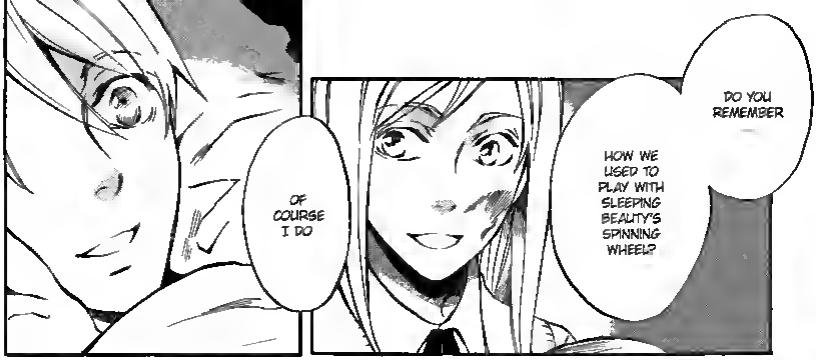
SYLV IS MY COUSIN
HE, UM, LIKES CRACKING JOKES.
COUSIN?
YES
Oh
UM,
That's what I heard.
Did he say "prince"?
Which country?

THEY SEEM PRETTY CLOSE.
LIKE TWINS
HMM.
I TOLD YOU NOT TO SAY THOSE THINGS.
YOU DID?
TRUE.
THEY LOOK ALIKE.

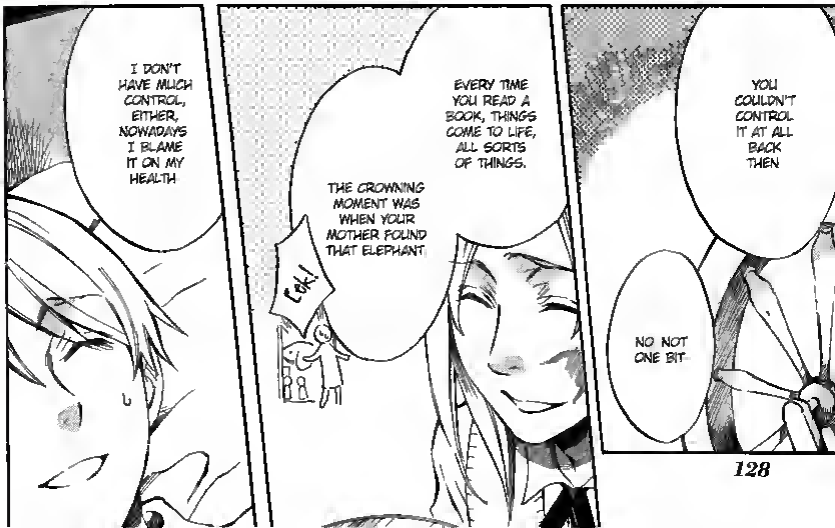
WE'RE LEAVING. SEE YOU LATER.
LATER.
HUH?
OK.
WE SHOULD BE HEADING BACK, TOO.
HUH?


I COULD HAVE SWORN I DIDN'T SEE SYLV'S REFLECTION.
WERE MY EYES PLAYING TRICKS ON ME?
"I SAW A GHOST THAT COULD HAVE BEEN A PRINCE."
.....
WE HAVE TO KEEP THIS BETWEEN OURSELVES
IF THE GROWN-UPS FIND OUT ABOUT YOU,
THEY'LL TAKE YOU AWAY FROM ME.
whirl whirl whirl whirl

whir-l whir-l whir-l
whir-l whir-l whir-l
HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
YOU SAID YOU FELT DIZZY, AND YOU FELL ASLEEP, LITERALLY.
I DID?
whir-l whir-l


DO YOU REMEMBER
HOW WE USED TO PLAY WITH SLEEPING BEAUTY'S SPINNING WHEEL?
OF COURSE I DO

ONE TIME, YOU EVEN READ A WITCH OUT OF A BOOK... SHE ALMOST KILLED US.
AH HA HA.


YOU COULDN'T CONTROL IT AT ALL BACK THEN
NO NOT ONE BIT
EVERY TIME YOU READ A BOOK, THINGS COME TO LIFE, ALL SORTS OF THINGS.
THE CROWNING MOMENT WAS WHEN YOUR MOTHER FOUND THAT ELEPHANT
EEK!
I DON'T HAVE MUCH CONTROL, EITHER, NOWADAYS I BLAME IT ON MY HEALTH

HEY, SYLV?
YEAH?
THERE'S NOT MUCH I LIKE ABOUT MYSELF, BUT I'M THANKFUL FOR THIS GIFT
I'VE ALWAYS ADMIRED YOU
YOU'RE FEARLESS,
STRONG,
AND KNOWING
A PRINCE IN CHARGE OF HIS DESTINY.
I USED TO ALWAYS...
MY POLAR OPPOSITE.

...WISH YOU WOULD MAGICALLY STEP OUT OF THE PAGES AND HANG OUT WITH ME...
One day, he said, "If I could have a friend who isn't afraid of this mark..."
"I WOULD
CECIL,

"...GIVE MY LIFE TO PROTECT YOU."
THAT'S A PROMISE.
WHAT?
YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT SPIRITS AND GHOSTS?
I COULD GIVE YOU AN ENTIRE LECTURE ON THEM
WHICH ERA SHOULD I START WITH?
NO, I'M NOT ASKING YOU FOR SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

I DON'T THINK BEING STALKED BY A GHOST IS NORMAL.
NOT EVEN IF THE SPIRIT MEANS NO HARM?
WELL, IT NORMALLY MEANS BAD NEWS, UNLESS THE SPIRIT IS THE PERSON'S GUARDIAN ANGEL
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A SPIRIT HANGS AROUND SOMEONE? IS THAT HARMFUL TO THAT PERSON?
SAY THE SPIRIT COMES FROM A DIFFERENT WORLD TO BEGIN WITH
EVEN IF IT HAS GOOD INTENTIONS,
IT BEING HERE COULD EVENTUALLY CAUSE A DIMENSIONAL RIFT.
IF THE SPIRIT BELONGS TO ANOTHER WORLD...
IS THERE A PARTICULAR SPIRIT YOU WANT TO MEET?

THE SNOW QUEEN, THE PRINCE,
THE SPINNING WHEEL, THE SPANISH FLEET.
ALL OF THEM COULD HAVE BEEN RIGHT AT HOME IN STORYBOOKS
UH, NO, THAT'S NOT IT
IMAGINE HOW FUN IT WOULD BE..
TO LIVE SURROUNDED BY THEM.
ONLY I WAS THINKING ...
MAYBE THAT'S WHAT THE GHOST STORIES ARE ALL ABOUT.
YOUR OWN PERSONAL SPIRIT...
JUST LIKE IN FAIRY TALES.

WHERE'S CECIL?

He seems like a workaholic
Uh, OK
LET'S GET TO WORK. WE HAVE BOOKS TO SORT OUT.
COME ON.
SHUFFLE
SHUFFLE

HE CALLED IN SICK, I THINK
SO I'M TAKING OVER TODAY.

HE CALLED IN SICK, HUH? WAS IT A COLD?

I HAVE TO HAND IT TO CECIL.
I DIDN'T REALIZE THERE WAS SO MUCH TO DO
MMM.
YOU'LL TIRE YOURSELF OUT IF YOU WORK NON-STOP

rub rub

YES, I THINK THAT WAS IT.
IT SEEMS TO ME LIKE HE'S BEEN GETTING WORN OUT EASILY THESE PAST FEW DAYS
Year of publication, number of pages...
GOOD THING HE HAS SYLV.
CECIL DOESN'T HAVE A ROOMMATE I'M SURE HE'S GETTING PLENTY OF REST
YEAH
SYLV?
WHO'S THAT?
?
ISN'T HE IN YOUR CLASS?
SYLV IS CECIL'S COUSIN, ACCORDING TO THE HORSE'S MOUTH. THEY'RE AWFULLY CLOSE.
MAYBE HE'S IN A DIFFERENT GRADE
CECIL ALWAYS KEEPS TO HIMSELF IN CLASS
IS HE THE CLASS OUTCAST OR SOMETHING?
OH, I WOULDN'T CALL HIM AN OUTCAST

MORE LIKE HE PUTS UP A WALL AROUND HIMSELF AND DOESN'T LET OTHER PEOPLE IN
HE ALWAYS HAS HIS NOSE IN A BOOK.
THOUGH, I THINK HE'D BE FUN TO TALK TO.
cough cough
YOU REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE LEFT YOUR ROOM JUST TO TURN IN YOUR ASSIGNMENTS.
GO GET SOME REST
I CAN'T DO THAT.
YOU'RE SERIOUS TO A FAULT.
OH, HI, RAUM.

I'M HERE TO CHECK UP ON YOU. I HEARD YOU WERE SICK.
ARE YOU UP AND AROUND ALREADY?
UM, THANKS.
THAT'S VERY NICE OF YOU.
IT'S JUST A MILD FEVER. NOTHING MAJOR.
cough
CECIL
cough cough
HE HAS A REFLECTION!
CECIL, WHY DON'T YOU GO AHEAD AND LIE DOWN IN YOUR ROOM? I HAVE SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT WITH RAUM HERE
UM, OK.
...

...
I'LL TELL YOU ANYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW, ASSUMING YOU WON'T USE IT AGAINST CECIL.
YOU SEEM TO HAVE PLENTY OF QUESTIONS FOR ME
THE GHOST IN THE LIBRARY— THE SPINNING WHEEL OR THE SNOW QUEEN OR WHATEVER—DOES CECIL HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT?
THAT IS, DID HE READ BOOKS THAT MENTION ONE OF THOSE THINGS OR SOMETHING?
YOU GUESSED RIGHT
BUT THEY AREN'T GHOSTS.
THEY'RE HARMLESS
THEY'RE NOT GHOSTS?
CECIL CAN BRING THINGS TO LIFE FROM THE BOOKS HE READS WELL, PARTIALLY.
THEY'RE LIKE HIS DREAMS, IN A SENSE THAT OTHER PEOPLE CAN SEE. THE CONCEPT IS BEYOND ME, THOUGH

THE PRINCE WITH A BIRTHMARK ON HIS FACE...
THAT WOULD BE ME
HERE'S THE BOOK IF YOU WANT TO READ IT
IT'S ABOUT A LONELY PRINCE WHO WANTS TO HAVE FRIENDS
.....
ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT CECIL?
OF COURSE YOU DON'T HAVE TO TAKE MY WORD FOR IT
I WOULDN'T HURT HIM FOR THE WORLD
I PROMISED HIM

OH, YEAH?
NO HARM DONE?
GRAB
YOU'RE HIS *IMAGINATION PARTIALLY* COME TO LIFE, HUH?
THEN WHAT DO YOU CALL *THIS?* YOU'RE TOO REAL TO THE TOUCH
YOU DON'T BELONG TO THIS WORLD
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT MESSING WITH THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS SIMPLY BY BEING HERE?

WHY DON'T YOU...
TRY IT OUT YOURSELF?
FIND SOMEONE FROM ANOTHER WORLD AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS
FOR EXAMPLE,
SOMEBODY FROM WAY, WAY BACK...
OR SOMEBODY WHOSE PLACE WAS FIXED IN THE PAST.
CAN I...
grip

RALIM, THAT'S MY BED
I KNOW I'M BORROW-ING IT.
.....
...PROVE THAT WITH THIS MUCH REALNESS?
Swing

HOW WAS HE?
HE SEEMED TO BE OK.
I WAS WONDERING HOW CECIL WAS DOING, SO I WENT TO CHECK UP ON HIM.
RATTLE

I'D SAY THOSE TWO ARE CARBON COPIES OF EACH OTHER
I WAS AWARE OF THE FAMILY RESEMBLANCE, BUT AFTER SEEING CECIL WITHOUT HIS GLASSES...
AT FIRST, WHEN I SAW CECIL IN BED, I TOOK HIM FOR SYLV
ABOUT?
BUT WAS I SURPRISED!

EVEN COUSINS CAN LOOK ALIKE ENOUGH TO BE MIRROR IMAGES, HUH?
.....
WHAT'S THIS BOOK DOING HERE?
OH, I BORROWED IT FROM SYLV
SYLV READS THIS KIND OF BOOK?
"ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS A DISTANT KINGDOM IN THE NORTH SURROUNDED BY WOODS WHERE WOLVES ROAMED..."
YAN.
DOES IT SAY WHAT KINGDOM?
HUH? IT'S A FAIRY TALE.
BUT JUDGING BY THE PICTURES, IT'S PROBABLY SET IN EASTERN EUROPE...
.....

"MIRROR IMAGES"...
"TWINS"...
flip
RAUM?
RUMMAGE
RUMMAGE

.....

I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!
HUH?
WAIT—
cough
cough

CECIL,
WE'VE REACHED THE BREAKING POINT
SYLV?
DOES IT HURT?
HUH?
HE'S GOTTEN WEAKER.
rough
knock
knock
CECIL, SYLV?
IT'S RALIM.
LET ME GUESS THAT WAS SYLV?
YOU EVEN SOUND ALIKE
...
creak
COME IN THE DOOR'S UNLOCKED

WHAT...
TELL ME, DOES THE STORYBOOK PRINCE FEED ON YOUR LIFE, CECIL?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? SYLV IS MY COUS—
NO, HE'S NOT. AND HE'S NOT A PRINCE, EITHER.
I MEAN, HOW IS IT POSSIBLE THAT A FOREIGN PRINCE LOOKS SO MUCH LIKE YOU,
HMM, CECIL?
Aare

!!
WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
CUT IT OUT!
YOU'LL KILL HIM!
STOP!
SYLV WILL—
YOU'RE BURNING SYLV!

HE'LL DIE—
SYLV?
I'M SO HAPPY
YOU'RE— ALL RIGHT?
THANK THE LORD!
YOU'RE NOT HURT AT ALL?

ARE YOU ACTUALLY HIS... DOUBLE?
HIS REFLECTION...
I'D BE LOST WITHOUT YOU.
YES, I'M HIS DOPPEL-GANGER
SYLV?
HE DIES, YES.
THEY SAY WHEN YOU MEET YOUR DOPPELGANGER, YOU'LL DIE OR GET YOUR LIFE SUCKED OUT OF YOU! THAT ONE
THEN, AS YOU GET STRONGER, CECIL...

WORLDS APART...
SO...
SYLV SHOULD STAY.
TOGETHER...
SYLV...
I THOUGHT I COULD END THIS,
BUT...
The prince said...
IF SYLV DIES, I WON'T GET TO SEE HIM!
I WON'T GET TO SEE HIM ANYMORE!
EVEN THOUGH WE'RE...
AND IF YOU DIE—
I KNOW!
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?!
YOU COULD DIE!
I ADMIRE HIM!
HE'S BRAVE AND SMART.
IF WE CAN'T STICK TOGETHER, I'D RATHER HE STAY!
ME, I'M NO ONE SPECIAL!
SYLV!
DON'T WORRY
I PROMISED WE'D STAY TOGETHER FOREVER.
TOGETHER? THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE!
YOU GUYS ARE FROM DIFFERENT WORLDS! YOU HAVE TO GO, OR CECIL WILL—
CECIL?
NO! DON'T TAKE HIM AWAY FROM ME!
HE CAN BE MY DOUBLE FOR ALL I CARE!

CECIL...
I MAY NOT BE THE PRINCE,
BUT I'LL KEEP THAT PROMISE.
"If I could have a friend ...

RAUM, YAN.
WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN TOGETHER, AND— MAYBE— WE ALWAYS WILL BE.
"...I would protect him."
HI THERE.
CECIL, IS IT OK IF I GO FIRST?
YEAH, I'LL JOIN YOU IN A MINUTE

YOU'RE TAKING IT BETTER THAN I THOUGHT
YEAH, WELL,
I FINALLY UNDER-STAND
AS LONG AS SYLV'S SPIRIT, STRENGTH, AND INSIGHT—AND SYLV HIMSELF—ARE PART OF ME,
I KNOW I CAN'T HATE MYSELF.
I'M PICKING MYSELF UP AND FORGING AHEAD, ONE STEP AT A TIME.
"I'LL PROTECT YOU."
IT'S GOING TO BE OK
WE'RE ONLY GOING BACK FULL CIRCLE
I'LL BE SURE TO KEEP THAT CHILDISH PROMISE...
IT'S MY TURN.
TO LIVE UP TO THAT PROMISE, RIGHT?
"WITH ALL MY LIFE!"